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LETTER DATED 14 DECEMBER 1999 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to convey the attached communication, dated 10 December 1999 (see annex), which I have received from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations.

I should be grateful if you would bring it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

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Annex

Letter dated 10 December 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) of 15 September 1999, I attach the fifth periodic report on the operations of the International Force, East Timor (INTERFET) (see appendix). I would appreciate your making the report available to the Security Council.

(Signed) Penny WENSLEY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Appendix

Fifth periodic report to the United Nations on the operations of the International Force, East Timor

11 November to 9 December 1999

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The operations of the International Force, East Timor (INTERFET) in East Timor have continued to be highly successful. The INTERFET Commander is very confident that in the near future he will be able to announce the complete fulfilment of his mandate under Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) of 15 September 1999.

2. In the 12 weeks since 20 September 1999, when the first INTERFET forces were deployed to East Timor, INTERFET has played a significant role in helping:

(a) To establish peace and security through the provision of a credible and deterrent security presence in all parts of the territory, including the Ambeno enclave and Atauro Island;

(b) To prevent armed violence by any group in East Timor, including militia groups;

(c) To develop, in cooperation with Indonesia, agreed procedures for border management along the East Timor-West Timor border;

(d) To create conditions and provide escort support for large numbers of displaced persons to return to their homes in East Timor;

(e) To facilitate the transition from the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET);

(f) To facilitate the conduct of humanitarian operations of increasing size and effectiveness across East Timor.

3. The success of INTERFET can be attributed to the performance by INTERFET commanders and national contingents, the continuing resolve and commitment shown by the United Nations and the international community, the cooperation of the Government of Indonesia and the courage and resilience of the East Timorese people.

4. INTERFET has therefore created a solid foundation that has prepared the territory for UNTAET and its military component - a United Nations peacekeeping operation - to operate in pursuit of the mandate of resolution 1272 (1999) of 25 October 1999. With good progress now being made in planning for the transition to a peacekeeping operation, the preconditions are now in place that will allow the transition from INTERFET to the peacekeeping operation to take

place. Australia will submit a comprehensive transition plan in the near future to the Secretary-General.

II. SECURITY SITUATION

5. With the reduction of the offensive activities of the militia, there are no significant threats to peace and security in East Timor. Discussions on pursuing objectives through political avenues and clear signals with respect to reconciliation from the National Council for East Timorese Resistance (CNRT) have increased the feeling of a reduced significant militia threat in the future. As noted in the previous report (S/1999/1169), outside the border regions the bulk of INTERFET forces are undertaking policing functions.

6. Some militia groups may continue to be a potential irritant, but mainly at a low level. Their greatest presence remains close to the West Timorese border with East Timor and near the Oecusse enclave. They have continued to harass and intimidate displaced persons in those areas. Estimates of the number of militia fluctuate for a variety of reasons: some minor leaders and some of the rank and file are returning to East Timor; militia are often collocated with local West Timorese and displaced persons, making it difficult to distinguish between the two; with some militia involved in criminal activity, their identity as a pro-integration group is becoming blurred; and significant elements of the militia leadership appear to be reviewing their plans for the future.

7. These factors make it harder to provide a reliable estimate of the number of militia. The Commander of INTERFET estimates that there could be as few as 1,000 to 2,000 militia of any military viability; indeed, any militia remaining in West Timor would likely be focusing on surviving and avoiding capture. Militia in East Timor probably number less than 100. It is extremely difficult for militia to operate in East Timor, beyond criminal activity.

III. BORDER ARRANGEMENTS

8. Throughout the reporting period, the dealings of INTERFET with Indonesian authorities, including the Indonesian armed forces (TNI), have continued to be cordial and cooperative. On 22 November the Commander of INTERFET, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, met with Major General Damiri, the TNI regional commander.

9. The outcome of this meeting was the signing of a memorandum of technical understanding on border management. The agreement represents a major step forward in managing the border regions: it satisfies a recommendation arising from the report of the joint INTERFET/TNI investigation into the incident that took place at Motaain (Mato Ain) near the border of West and East Timor on 10 October 1999 (S/1999/1146, annex) and signals a new level of cooperation between INTERFET, UNTAET and TNI. The memorandum calls for regular coordination between parties to the agreement and the establishment of secure checkpoints for border crossings. The Commander of INTERFET will meet with the responsible TNI

officer, Major General Syahnakri (Major General Damiri's replacement), on a weekly basis to discuss border management issues.

10. The memorandum also reaffirms commitments given by TNI and the Government of Indonesia to ensure the safe and secure return of displaced persons to East Timor. It establishes a joint border commission, which should accelerate the pace of repatriation of displaced persons and ensure that pro-integration militia members do not harass or intimidate returning refugees. These initiatives are welcomed.

IV. HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND REPATRIATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS

11. INTERFET troops have continued to conduct patrols, staff checkpoints, escort convoys and facilitate humanitarian operations. INTERFET is involved in the repatriation of displaced persons, especially secondary transportation of refugees to their home towns. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that the total number of returnees is now in excess of 110,000. Significant progress is now being made in the repatriation effort, and INTERFET looks forward to further results stemming from the recently signed border agreement.

12. INTERFET has also established a secure environment in the Oecusse enclave for the repatriation of refugees.

V. DRAWDOWN OF FORCES

13. Several contingents of the multinational force, including contingents from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, will begin to withdraw some of their troops or assets from East Timor in the next few weeks. Other countries are currently considering their drawdown arrangements. A drawdown is possible because INTERFET has created a security environment that is more benign than when the initial deployment took place. From an operational perspective, INTERFET is confident that its mission will be unaffected by the planned withdrawal of certain military elements. Where necessary, commercial arrangements have been put in place to provide ongoing capability, notably in the areas of communications and transport. The commencement of a withdrawal of assets from INTERFET highlights the continued need to expedite planning for the transition to the United Nations peacekeeping operation.

VI. TRANSITION TO THE UNITED NATIONS TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN EAST TIMOR

14. The arrival of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in East Timor has accelerated progress in the expansion of UNTAET and in planning for the transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

15. From a security perspective, the key issue in the transition to UNTAET is planning for the introduction of a peacekeeping force. The Government of Australia will shortly submit to the United Nations a comprehensive plan for the

transition from INTERFET to a peacekeeping operation. To facilitate and expedite planning for the transition, it would be important to have the peacekeeping operation Commander and his core staff in-country as soon as possible. The early announcement of the Commander would be welcomed.

16. The Commander of INTERFET has also undertaken discussions in Dili with the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hedi Annabi, to discuss the proposed drawdown of forces from INTERFET and preliminary arrangements for the transition to a peacekeeping operation. This information has been conveyed to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at United Nations Headquarters, which is closely involved in this process.

17. In a joint initiative between UNTAET and INTERFET, local Timorese have been selected to become unarmed security officers guarding public utilities such as the power station and the telecommunications facility. Of the 250 or so security guards, about 55 are former members of the Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor who have made a decision to reintegrate into civil life and who will undergo training in security procedures. UNTAET will pay for the employees' salaries. The first group of graduates, which should be ready by early December, will allow INTERFET troops - and subsequently the United Nations peacekeeping troops - to focus their attention on core military tasks.

VII. RELATIONS AMONG THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EAST TIMORESE RESISTANCE, THE UNITED NATIONS TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN EAST TIMOR AND THE INTERNATIONAL FORCE, EAST TIMOR

18. Another strong indicator of the achievement of the INTERFET mandate has been the progress and prominence of civil affairs in East Timor as opposed to security concerns. Since his arrival in Dili on 16 November, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been able to develop an effective dialogue and sound working relationship with both CNRT and INTERFET. UNTAET has also begun to develop consultative processes with CNRT representatives. INTERFET and CNRT have made considerable progress in developing a working relationship.

VIII. OUTLOOK

19. The security outlook for East Timor is positive. The threat from the militia has been effectively nullified. INTERFET has played an increasingly significant role in the repatriation of displaced persons to East Timor and other humanitarian assistance activities. As such, the INTERFET mandate has been largely fulfilled, and there are few obstacles remaining to the transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation and the assumption of greater responsibility by UNTAET.